

Prayer Meeting

CAUSES OF THANKSGIVING.

Week Beginning Nov. 21. Joel 2:21-27.

The prophet begins by proclaiming impending judgment upon the people and exhorts them to be warned, lament, mourn and be girded with sackcloth. These threatened judgments would especially affect the people in their temporal and material estates. The products of the soil would be destroyed by vast multitudes of insects, by drouths—for the rivers of water were to be dried up and by fires that would sweep over fields and through forests. The beasts were to groan and the herds of cattle were to be perplexed because they had no pasture.

The people were exhorted to sanctify a fast, to call a solemn assembly and to gather with their elders in the house of the Lord, and to cry unto him. They were to recognize that God's hand was in that which they were about to suffer and to know that it was his chastisement for their sins. "Alas for the day! for the day of the Lord is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come." A conquering army of extraordinary fierceness and power was to invade and make desolate their land if they did not repent.

To avert these distresses the people were admonished to turn to the Lord with all their heart and with fasting and with weeping and with mourning and to rend their heart; and the assurance is given that God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness.

The exhortation is repeated, to gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children. The priests, the ministers of the Lord were to weep and say: "Spare thy people O Lord and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them." Then the promises made that the Lord would be jealous for his land and pity his people, and would no more make them a reproach among the heathen.

Great temporal prosperity was to follow this repenting and turning to the Lord. The fields and vineyards and orchards were to yield their abundance and the beasts of the field were to "be not afraid," for the pasture of the wilderness would spring afresh. The rains were to come in their proper season; the floors were to be full of wheat and vessels were to overflow with wine and oil. The children of Zion were to be glad and rejoice in the Lord. They were to eat in plenty and be satisfied and praise the name of the Lord that had dealt wondrously with them. The effect of their discipline and the special favor of their God would be, "Ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel and that I am the Lord your God."

We are concerned especially with the promise of bounty to that nation that reverences God's authority and honors his law. His sovereignty in the temporal affairs of his people and of mankind is supreme. If we have bountiful harvests it is because in his infinite kindness he bestows them. If there is national prosperity it is because he is our supreme ruler. If there is contentment in the midst of the people it is because he administers their affairs. If there is internal or international peace, it is because he rules among the inhabitants of the earth. If we have just and wise rules it is because "The king's heart is in the hands of the Lord and he turneth it as the rivers of waters wheresoever he will."

There is a tendency in human nature to feel independent of God at the very time that he is most lavishly bestowing his blessings and distinguishing his people by his favor. It is a humiliating commentary on our ingratitude and our stupidity in perceiving and construing the realities of our life. Doubtless this very tendency had become dominant in Israel at the time that Joel wrote his prophecy; and it was only by this most fearful decree that they were aroused to a conviction of their guilt and peril. It is possible that America may come under the curse that was threatened by this prophet. Persistency in our materialistic mania and our practical renunciation of God's claims upon our reverence and obedience will bring the curse upon us, that may be in degree and in form as terrifying as was ever threatened against his ancient people.

On the other hand grateful appreciation of the divine bounty is the condition upon which we may expect to have that bounty continued; and what is more important, the condition upon which God's gifts are to be most fruitful to our real and highest happiness. As a people we may truly say, "He hath not dealt so with any nation." The land in which we live is the most favored of the earth. How vast, almost limitless are its resources. Year after year God has given us "rain from heaven and fruitful seasons." He has given us a place among the nations, which is second to none, and an opportunity for moulding the future of mankind such as no other age or nation has possessed. Shall we be found worthy of this trust and devoutly fulfil this mission?

Young People's Societies

"THE BATTLE OF THE SLUM."

Topic for Sunday, November 28: Home Missions: "The Battle of the Slum." Luke 14:15-23.

DAILY READINGS.

Monday: The way downward. Proverbs 1:20-23.

Tuesday: Exceeding bitterness. Jeremiah 2:9-19.

Wednesday: Prodigals in the slum. Luke 15:11-32.

Thursday: The Saviour in the slum. Luke 5:29-32.

Friday: The slum worth saving. Luke 7:36-50.

Saturday: Tears for the city. Luke 19:41-46.

The problem of the slum is but one of the problems of home missions. That the slum is found only in the city and is for city missions still keeps it close to us as a most practical phase of home missions.

The slum is as inevitable as sin. It is sin in some of the worst forms congested. And it is sin brought so close to sin that it is intensified and increased. Sin no less than misery "loves company," and binds its votaries together.

Many a time, however, denizens of the slums are not there willingly. Wives are carried by husbands, children by parents, not by consent. Poverty has forced many into the cheap quarters of the purlieus of better life and homes.

And all in the slums, whether unwillingly or of choice, have souls to be saved. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. Were he here today, could we believe that he would pass by the wretched streets and the more wretched homes or quarters of these souls?

The problem is not to be dealt with as a fad. It is too serious. Those who go "slumming," as it is called, are only gratifying a morbid curiosity. So far as they themselves are concerned they are playing with fire, with the flames already roaring.

There are those who may safely and wisely go into such parts of our cities. They are not the young or the giddy, but the old, the settled, the recognized wise and discreet. The Salvation Army people have been most usual in this department of work.

Only as one goes into this work as Christ would have gone, need one expect to accomplish good in it. His purpose, his purity, his tact, his tenderness, his yearning for the souls of men must be in the heart and mind and hands and lips of the worker here.

"Social settlements" have been tried in the slums. Their results have seemed to vary, so that it can hardly yet be determined just how far they will prove effective. Certainly apart from the religion of Christ and solely as sociological experiments they will do little permanent good.

Institutional churches have not so far solved the problem and are not likely to do so. Amusement, entertainment, and something to do are not enough. They do not reach to the inner life. Their work is too much surface work, too much working from the circumference to the center instead of from the center to the circumference.

The invitation to the gospel feast is to go to the unfortunate people of the slum no less than to the palaces of the rich. "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled."